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Notten, N.; Kraaykamp, G.

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Parents and the media
A study of social differentiation in parental media socialization

Natascha Notten *, Gerbert Kraaykamp [1]

Department of Sociology, Radboud University Nijmegen, P.O. Box 9104, 6500 HE Nijmegen, The Netherlands

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Abstract

In this study we analysed the effects of parental social background and family composition on various types of parental media socialization. We employed the Family Survey Dutch Population 1998, 2000 and 2003 ($N = 2608$), and analysed respondents' reports of socialization practices in their parental home. Respondents from high-status families report more extensive parental media socialization in all highbrow and guidance activities. In contrast, a parental example of popular television viewing is reported less often by children from the higher social strata. Family composition also affects parental media socialization practices. Parental media guidance takes place less frequently in families that have experienced a divorce and in larger families. Finally, parental highbrow media consumption evidently causes more parental media guidance, therefore interpreting a substantial part of the effects of parental social background.

1. Introduction

A large body of theoretical and empirical research in the social sciences demonstrates the dominance of conditions within the parental home in predicting the well-being and success of children (Bennet et al., 2002; Bianchi and Robinson, 1997; Coleman, 1988; De Graaf et al., 2000a). Parents furnish their children with skills, competencies and resources, but this parental socialization differs both in quality and in quantity among social groups. As a result, children tend to be unequally endowed with beneficial competencies. This study focuses on parental in-home media socialization activities that may be beneficial or disadvantageous in children's

* Corresponding author. Tel.: +31 24 3612037; fax: +31 24 3612399.
E-mail addresses: n.notten@maw.ru.nl (N. Notten), G.Kraaykamp@maw.ru.nl (G. Kraaykamp).
URL: http://www.nnotten.nl, http://gerbertkraaykamp.ruhosting.nl/
[1] Tel.: +31 24 3612014; fax: +31 24 3612399.

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upbringing. Parents may nurture their children with prestigious or cognitively stimulating reading and television viewing, but they might also transmit less socially valued or non-stimulating media habits to their offspring (Austin, 2001; Bus et al., 1995; Kraaykamp, 2003; McLeod and Brown, 1976; Nathanson, 1999; Verboord and Van Rees, 2003).

We study social differentiation in experienced parental media socialization, and expect social background and family composition to be relevant explanatory factors. Research has shown that families with high socioeconomic status have more cultural, social and cognitive resources to help their children ''conquer the world'' than low-status families. Consequently, parents from privileged social backgrounds are more successful in equipping their children with beneficial resources (Bourdieu, 1984; De Graaf et al., 2000a; Lareau, 2003). Another factor influencing parental socialization activities is a family's composition. The intensity and quality of parent–child interaction has been found to be affected by factors like a parental divorce and the mother's employment status (Coleman, 1988; Sandefur et al., 1992). Consequently, our first research question reads: *How do parents from (a) various social backgrounds and (b) various family compositions differ in their media socialization activities?*

Among media socialization practices, we distinguish parental media consumption (parental media example) from parental media instruction and guidance, and we assume a causal relation between the two. We consider it likely that parents' own media consumption will affect the efforts they undertake in guiding and coaching their offspring's media behaviour. Thus, our second research question is stated as follows: *To what extent does parental media consumption explain differences in parental guidance activities?*

The current study is innovative for a number of reasons. First, it makes theoretical and empirical contributions to research on the reproduction of cultural resources. Here we study primarily the media aspects of cultural socialization rather than the elitist cultural outings that are traditionally investigated in cultural reproduction research, and we take both parental social background and family composition into account. Second, our research explicitly acknowledges parents' roles as both intentional and unintentional educators when it comes to reading and television-viewing habits. We therefore study the parental example and parental guidance activities separately. Third, we study the actual socialization achieved by respondents making use of retrospective measurements. Most media studies focus on the current situation when children are still living in the parental home. This may, however, lead to an overvaluation of the situation at the time of the interview. Our data contain respondents' reports of completed parental media socialization; respondents no longer lived in the parental home. Fourth and finally, we use three waves of the Family Survey Dutch Population (De Graaf et al., 1998, 2000b, 2003), employing information on 2608 adult Dutch respondents who reported their socialization experiences. This should produce conclusions on parental media socialization concerning people from birth cohorts ranging from 1955 to 1985.

2. Theory and expectations

2.1. Parents and media socialization

Previous research has shown that parents contribute to a child's development in at least two major domains (Snow et al., 1991). First, parents' provision of a safe environment is a precondition for successful development. Second, and more importantly for our study, parents fulfil the role of educators, undertaking various socializing activities to guide their children's behaviour. Furthermore, we believe it is relevant to acknowledge that parents may carry out their

educational task both intentionally and unintentionally. Parents are intentional educators when they are actively instructing their children. But children may also learn by imitating parental behaviour, in which case parents are unintentional educators (Bandura and Walters, 1963; Bennet et al., 2002; Kraaykamp, 2001, 2003; McLeod and Brown, 1976). Without a doubt, children imitate or incorporate parental examples best when behaviours are frequently exhibited and underlined. Because media is often consumed in the family home, we assume that this is true for parental media behaviour and media instruction activities.

We focus on parental media socialization activities that are beneficial and those that are disadvantageous to children in terms of nurturing the cultural competencies that potentially enhance a child's success in life. Therefore, central in this study is parental 'highbrow' and 'lowbrow' media socialization. Highbrow media socialization activities refer to cognitively stimulating and socially rewarded (high-status) parental behaviours that may benefit a child's development, such as literary reading and watching informational television programs. Lowbrow media socialization constitutes the possibly disadvantageous parental example of hardly stimulating and low valued media use, like watching soap operas on television and reading romantic novels. We differentiate two key factors that cause diversity in parental media socialization practices, namely, parental social background and family composition.

2.2. *Social background and media socialization*

Parental socialization has been studied by scholars from a broad range of disciplines, and research has repeatedly shown that socialization is affected by the parents' own social background (Lareau, 2003; Livingstone, 2002; Roe, 2000; Van Eijk, 1997). Stratification research has traditionally used educational level and occupational status as indicators of social background. Occupational status refers to a family's class or position (its economic and symbolic resources) and educational level represents its cultural capital (intellectual and cognitive abilities). In studying the influence of parents' social background on their media socialization activities we take both educational level and occupational status into account.

Two lines of research dominate the study of intergenerational transmission of cultural and media behaviour. First, within cultural consumption research a significant role is assigned to a person's cultural competency. From information theory (Ganzeboom, 1982) it follows that parents with a higher education have a higher level of cognitive skills and cultural competency. They will subsequently be attracted to more complex (highbrow) media resources and media content than lower educated parents. By the same reasoning, Rosengren and Windahl (1989) state that media use is a mental activity and is predicted by the cognitive training one has experienced. Indeed, research has found that higher educated people read more highbrow literature and consume more culturally oriented television content than lower educated respondents (Kraaykamp, 2001; Roe, 2000; Van Eijck and Van Rees, 2000). It therefore seems reasonable to assume that children from higher educated parents are more familiar with parental highbrow media consumption and confronted less with parental lowbrow media use than children whose parents have a lower educational level.

Second, from a neo-Weberian point of view, social class is assumed to play a distinct role when it comes to (parental) media behaviour. This research line views social status as a determinant of a person's access to scarce resources and interests. By demonstrating a particular lifestyle based on the amount of accessible cultural and material resources, members of a status group confirm the existing boundaries between classes in society (Bourdieu, 1984). Consuming highbrow media content confers more prestige and is more common among higher social status

groups than lowbrow media use. In the higher social strata, literary reading as well as watching cultural and informative television programs generally are regarded as respected activities. Consequently, children from higher status families are far more exposed to a highbrow and beneficial parental media example than children from lower status families. In contrast, lowbrow media content, such as soap operas and romantic novels, is thought to confer low or negative esteem and is generally associated with low-status (Beentjes et al., 2001; Kraaykamp, 2001; Roe, 2000). We argue that by setting an example and functioning as role models, parents unintentionally transmit their media behaviour to their children. Hence, when we combine the abovementioned two lines of research our first hypothesis reads: *Parents with (a) a higher educational level and (b) a higher occupational status consume highbrow media content to a greater extent and lowbrow media content to a lesser extent than parents with (a) a lower educational level and (b) a lower occupational status.*

It is reasonable to assume that there is also a relation between parental social background and intentional parental socialization activities, such as media guidance or mediation. Parents with a higher educational level generally possess better linguistic and cultural skills and are cognitively well trained. They are consequently more aware of the possible risks and benefits of exposure to specific media. Therefore, these parents are probably more inclined and better equipped to educate their children in beneficial media use than less educated parents. In general, well-educated parents seem to invest more time in activities that stimulate their children's cognitive development (Bianchi and Robinson, 1997; Lareau, 2003). To give their offspring the best possible start in life, culturally competent parents are thus expected to intentionally invest a substantial amount of time in cultivating their children's cultural competencies. With respect to the media, previous research has associated parental educational level with the provision of literacy opportunities and promotion of literacy in the home (Leseman and De Jong, 1998). It has also found parents with a high socioeconomic status to be more likely to set television-viewing rules and to discuss media content more frequently with their children than parents from lower status households (Pasquier, 2001; Valkenburg et al., 1999; Vandewater et al., 2005). Our second hypothesis thus states: *Parents with (a) a higher educational level and (b) a higher occupational status guide their children's media consumption more actively than parents with (a) a lower educational level and (b) a lower occupational status.*

2.3. Family composition and media socialization

With respect to children's socialization and upbringing, research has established that not only is parental social background of importance, a family's composition makes a difference as well (Powell et al., 2006; Sandefur et al., 1992). Coleman (1988) argues that the transmission of parental resources depends on parent-child bonding and interaction. When in certain families contact between parent and child is limited, parental socialization activities (both intentional and unintentional) are likely to occur less frequently. Research on parental investment in childrearing has shown several family composition factors to be related to parents' time spent with children (Sayer et al., 2004). We study four family factors in relation to parental media socialization.

First, within a divorced (single-parent) household, necessary tasks and paid labour are more likely to cause a time squeeze. Among the consequences of a divorce is the reduction of (quality) time for the single-parent to spend on media consumption or to invest in guiding children's reading abilities and television consumption. Children with married or cohabiting parents may benefit from two adults, who can bundle their resources and use their family time complementarily (Pasquier, 2001; Sayer et al., 2004). Our third hypothesis thus reads: *Divorced*

parents consume (a) less highbrow media content, (b) less lowbrow media content and (c) guide their children's media consumption less actively than married parents.

Second, the mother's age at the birth of a child seems to be a relevant predictor of successful accumulation and reproduction of resources (Powell et al., 2006). Delayed childbearing is usually a conscious choice and results in older mothers. In general, older mothers have chosen motherhood intentionally, and are therefore more predisposed to invest time in their children. Research has revealed that, controlling for parental social background, older mothers provide a more nurturing, cognitively stimulating, supportive and stable home than young mothers. Therefore, mother's age constitutes an indication of maturity and a proxy for the ability to provide a constructive nurturing and resourceful environment (Fergusson and Woodward, 1999; Kalmijn and Kraaykamp, 2005). Hence, our fourth hypothesis states: *Older mothers consume (a) more highbrow media content, (b) less lowbrow media content and (c) guide their children's media consumption more actively than younger mothers.*

As a third aspect that may play a role in family socialization processes, we study the working status of the mother during her offspring's childhood. Despite the vast increase in women's labour participation and the time fathers spend on child care, research still indicates that mothers invest more time in their offspring than fathers (Pasquier, 2001; Sayer et al., 2004). On the other hand, working mothers obviously have less time to spend on their children's well-being than stay-at-home mothers, and research findings seem to confirm this notion (Warren, 2005; Zick and Bryant, 1996). Research, however, seems inconclusive on the exact effects of the mother's working status on socialization practices. Working mothers are better equipped (e.g. have more cognitive and social skills) to guide their children's development, but they face considerable time restrictions (Zick et al., 2001). Since we include a parent's socioeconomic resources in the modelling, this study assumes that the mother's working status manifests itself mainly in time restrictions. Hence our fifth hypothesis reads: *Working mothers consume (a) less highbrow media content, (b) less lowbrow media content and (c) guide their children's media consumption less actively than non-working mothers.*

Fourth, we study family size, represented by the number of siblings in a household. Resource dilution arguments suggest that the more siblings there are with whom parental resources have to be shared, the less is left for each individual child. This dilution is predicted to work with regard to human and financial resources, as well as when it comes to parental attention and parenting time (Blake, 1981; Coleman, 1988). When there are more children, parents have to divide time and attention among their offspring and have less leisure time. The (quality of) time and activities parents spend in the light of media socialization thus decrease with a greater number of siblings. Recent research, however, has shown that family size does not negatively affect the frequency with which mothers read to their children; a possible explanation is that reading aloud can be done simultaneously with multiple siblings (Zick et al., 2001). Nevertheless, from the child's point of view we expect a large number of siblings to negatively affect the parental media socialization experienced by each individual child. Our sixth hypothesis thus reads: *Within larger families, parents consume (a) less highbrow media content, (b) less lowbrow media content and (c) guide their children's media consumption less actively than in smaller families.*

2.4. Parental media consumption predicts media guidance

Past research on cultural reproduction has indicated that apart from parental social background, parental cultural consumption is an important determinant of a person's cultural

competency and educational attainment (De Graaf et al., 2000a; Van Eijk, 1997). However, in the process of cultural reproduction actual guidance activities have often been disregarded, so research remains unclear about how exactly parental cultural behaviours are reproduced into the next generation. In our study we have concrete measures of parental media guidance activities, which makes it possible for us to study the extent to which parental media consumption indeed causes active guidance and commitment in introducing children to the cultural domain. We expect parents with a strong preference for highbrow media content to be more actively involved in guiding their children to beneficial media use than parents who themselves favour entertaining and non-cognitively stimulating media content. Our seventh hypothesis thus states: *The more frequently parents consume highbrow media content, the more actively they guide their children's media behaviour.* Alternatively, our eighth hypothesis reads: *The more frequently parents consume lowbrow media content, the less actively they guide their children's media behaviour.* In this respect it seems likely that the social background effects on parental media guidance will be mediated by parents' own media behaviour.

3. Data and measurements

3.1. Data

To test our hypotheses we employ three waves of the Family Survey Dutch Population (FSDP), conducted in 1998, 2000 and 2003 (De Graaf et al., 1998, 2000b, 2003).[2] The FSDP combines face-to-face and written interviews and is held among a nationally representative sample of the Dutch population between ages 18 and 70. A major advantage of the FSDP is that beside a primary respondent his/her partner is also interviewed. Since the media socialization of primary respondents and their partners took place independently, we chose to include each as individual respondents. The FSDP holds information on several aspects of individuals' life course. This study uses the retrospective questions on childhood experiences and family background. A drawback of retrospective reports is that they may be skewed by memory effects and social desirability bias. However, previous research on the FSDP data showed no systematic error in retrospective measures of parental cultural capital (De Vries and De Graaf, 2006).

To ensure that respondents' socialization had been completed, we removed individuals living with (at least one of) their parents (5.0%). In the Netherlands, television was introduced around 1955. For respondents born before 1955 (42.2%) and respondents reporting that there was no television set in their home during childhood (4.1%), questions about television-related socialization obviously were void. We therefore excluded these respondents. As a result, we analyse people from birth cohorts between 1955 and 1985.

3.2. Measurements

We distinguished two main types of media use: book reading and television viewing. For both categories we focused on highbrow and lowbrow content consumption as well as parental guidance activities. Altogether we studied six distinct parental media socialization activities, referring to the time the respondent was between ages 5 and 15.

[2] The actual number of respondents in the three surveys was 2029 in 1998, 1561 in 2000 and 2174 in 2003.

Respondents reported on five types of parental book reading, and factor analyses confirmed a highbrow and lowbrow reading dimension.[3] We measured *parental highbrow book reading* using respondents' reports on fathers' and mothers' reading (a) Dutch or translated literature, (b) novels in a foreign language and (c) popular-scientific books when the respondent was around 15 years old. Answer categories were (0) never, (1) sometimes and (2) often. We standardized all items and constructed a scale by taking the mean scores. The variable parental highbrow book reading was standardized by ranking the scores into percent points (between 0 and 100). Respondents' reports on *parental lowbrow book reading* refer to fathers' and mothers' reading (a) detective, science fiction or war novels and (b) romantic novels. Answer categories were again (0) never, (1) sometimes and (2) often. The variable parental lowbrow book reading was standardized by ranking the scores into percent points.

A confirmative factor analyses on six types of television programs established a highbrow and lowbrow dimension for television viewing.[4] For the construction of *parental highbrow television viewing* we took the mean of two items: (a) parents watching informative programs and (b) parents watching cultural-artistic programs when the respondent was 15 years old. Answer categories were (0) never, (1) sometimes and (2) often. Standardization took place by ranking the scores between 0 and 100. *Parental lowbrow television viewing* was measured by four items reflecting lowbrow television programs that parents watched: (a) films or series, (b) game shows, (c) sports and (d) soap operas. Answer categories again were (0) never, (1) sometimes and (2) often. Although films and series might also contain highbrow elements, factor analyses clearly confirmed this genre as lowbrow. A scale was constructed taking the mean of the four items. The variable parental lowbrow television viewing was transformed into percent points employing a ranking procedure.

Parental reading guidance was measured by the following five statements on parent-child reading activities: (a) as a toddler I was read to by one of my parents; (b) for my birthday/Christmas/St. Nicholas I received books as a gift; (c) my parents recommended books; (d) at home we discussed the books I read; (e) my parents were interested in what I was reading. Answer categories were (0) never, (1) sometimes and (2) often. A scale was constructed by taking the mean score of the five items after standardization ($\alpha = 0.8$). The variable parental reading guidance was standardized by ranking the scores into percent points.

Parental television guidance was probed in the FSDP 2003 only, represented by nine indicators of parental television guidance when the respondent was between 5 and 12 years of age. These indicators represent three forms of parental mediation: restrictive guidance, co-viewing and strategic or instructive guidance (Austin, 2001; Valkenburg et al., 1999). Since the effects of co-viewing and restrictive guidance are equivocal and do not lead per se to beneficial media skills and knowledge (Nathanson, 1999), we focus on the items regarding instructive television guidance formulated as follows: (a) my parents discussed with me why something seen on television was wrong, (b) in our family television programs were discussed often and (c) my parents helped me understand what I saw on television. Answers were given on a 4-point scale ranging from (0) entirely untrue to (3) entirely true. A scale was created taking average scores and standardized into percent points employing a ranking procedure ($\alpha = 0.8$).

[3] For both mothers and fathers, reading 'detective novels, science fiction and war novels' loaded on both dimensions. On theoretical grounds and because popular reading after removing detective novels was measured only by reading romantic novels (which is done most frequently by women) we decided to assign this genre to lowbrow reading.

[4] Sports loaded a fraction higher on the popular dimension. Because of the popularity of these programs (52% watches often) and the limited cultural content of sport programs, this item was assigned to the popular dimension.

In this study, parental social background refers to parental educational level and occupational status. *Parental educational level* is measured as the number of years required to obtain the educational level concerned, and ranges from 6 years (primary school) to 21 years (Ph.D.) (De Graaf et al., 2000a). To construct parental educational level we took the maximum of the respondent's father's and mother's completed educational level. We measured *parental occupational status* by taking the maximum of the father's and mother's ISEI score of their occupation when the respondent was aged 15 (Ganzeboom et al., 1992).

Four indicators for family composition were taken into account. The questionnaire asked whether the parents were divorced, and if so, in what year. We constructed a *parental divorce* variable that indicated whether a respondent's parents were divorced in the formative years (ages 0–12), with answer categories (0) no parental divorce and (1) parental divorce. *Mother's age at childbirth* refers to the age of the mother in the year the respondent was born. To account for influential cases, we rounded exceptionally young mothers up to the age of 16 (10 cases), topping down exceptionally old mothers to the age of 45 (10 cases). We centred this variable to the mean (29 years). Two questions were used to measure whether a respondent had a *working mother*, namely (a) was your mother employed for at least 1 year during preschool and (b) was your mother employed for at least 1 year during primary school? We constructed a variable that indicates whether the mother was either (0) non-working or (1) working during the respondent's childhood. *Family size* represents the total number of siblings in the family, including the respondent. We levelled it down to a maximum of eight siblings (for 4.8% of the respondents). Finally, we controlled for gender and birth cohort. *Gender* indicates whether the respondent (child) is a (0) male or (1) female. *Birth cohort* is a continuous variable ranging from 1955 to 1985, and indicates the birth cohort of the respondent (child). Respondents with a missing score on one of the selected (in)dependent variables were removed (13.7%). Our resulting dataset contains 2608 individuals. Our analysis of social differentiation in parental television guidance makes use of the 2003 FSDP data only. In this case, the dataset contains 1115 individuals. Table 1 presents a detailed description of the variables.

4. Multivariate models

4.1. Research design

For each of the four types of parental media consumption we estimated two OLS regression models. The first model contains the control aspects and the parental social background variables. The second model adds the family composition variables. Additionally, for parental reading and television guidance we estimated a third model in which the parental media example is included as a predictor. We present unstandardized and standardized regression coefficients.

4.2. Results for parental media consumption

Table 2 presents the results for parental book reading and television viewing. Model 1 shows that respondents from younger generations report less highbrow reading than respondents born in the older cohorts. For gender, the results for parental highbrow television viewing stand out ($b = 3.2$). Interesting and puzzling is the fact that girls reported their parents watching more highbrow television programs than boys did. This finding may be explained by selective memory effects, but is more likely due to a gendered socialization with respect to media use.[5]

[5] Additional analyses of our data show that girls score significantly higher on parental co-viewing than boys.

Table 1
Description of the variables.

	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	SD	*N*
Control variables					
Birth cohort (1955 = 0)	0.00	30.00	10.36	6.48	2608
Gender (1 = female)	0.00	1.00	0.53	0.50	2608
Social background					
Parental educational level	6.00	21.00	10.50	3.33	2608
Parental occupational status	10.00	90.00	46.82	16.03	2608
Family composition					
Parents divorced (1 = divorced)	0.00	1.00	0.05	0.22	2608
Mother's age at childbirth (29 = 0)	−13.00	16.00	−0.48	5.78	2608
Working mother (1 = working)	0.00	1.00	0.32	0.47	2608
Family size	1.00	8.00	3.39	1.68	2608
Parental media socialization					
Parental highbrow book reading	0.36	99.98	50.02	28.72	2608
Parental lowbrow book reading	0.33	100.00	50.02	28.73	2608
Parental highbrow television viewing	0.59	97.55	50.02	27.12	2608
Parental lowbrow television viewing	0.36	99.23	50.02	28.85	2608
Parental reading guidance	1.42	97.62	50.02	28.85	2608
Parental television guidance	1.90	98.74	50.04	28.76	1155

Source: Family Survey Dutch Population 1998, 2000, 2003.

In line with our expectation, results confirm that parental highbrow reading and highbrow television viewing are found more often among higher educated parents; each additional year of parental education leads to an increase of 3.7 percent points in literary reading and 1.7 percent points in highbrow television viewing. Moreover, the effects of parental occupational status are in the predicted direction; the higher the occupational status of the parents, the more exposed children are to their parents highbrow reading and television viewing.

As hypothesized, children with higher educated parents and parents with higher status occupations are less confronted with parental lowbrow television consumption than children from lower status households. In contrast, the results on lowbrow reading content were surprising. Higher educated parents as well as parents with a higher occupational status were reported to read more lowbrow content than less culturally competent and lower status parents. These findings contradict our expectations, and might reflect the generally higher and elite status of reading activities compared with the lowbrow and less valued status of television viewing.

Model 2 adds family composition aspects; most remarkable here is that the effects of social background have hardly changed. Both social background and family composition have independent effects on all parental media behaviours, with the exception of parental literary reading. Experiencing a parental divorce and having a working mother seem unrelated to parental highbrow media consumption. Still, we do observe that having an older mother is advantageous when it comes to setting a more beneficial example in television viewing, and this finding corroborates our hypothesis. Additionally, growing up in a large family reduces the cultural quality of one's television socialization: every additional sibling reduces a parent's highbrow television viewing by 0.9 percentage points.

Family composition seems to be an influential factor in parental lowbrow media example. Remarkably, children from divorced families are significantly less exposed to parents reading popular content than children in two-parent families ($b = -7.8$). Apparently, time pressure limits

Table 2
OLS regression on parental media consumption of social background and family composition (standard errors between brackets).

	Parental highbrow book reading				Parental highbrow television viewing				Parental lowbrow book reading				Parental lowbrow television viewing			
	Model 1		Model 2		Model 1		Model 2		Model 1		Model 2		Model 1		Model 2	
	B	*β*	*B*	*β*	*B*	*β*	*B*	*β*	*B*	*β*	*B*	*β*	*B*	*β*	*B*	*β*
Control variables																
Birth cohort (1955 = 0)	−0.186	−0.042*	−0.183	−0.041*	−0.101	−0.024	−0.055	−0.013	0.051	0.012	−0.101	−0.023	0.126	0.028	−0.011	−0.002
	(0.076)		(0.080)		(0.081)		(0.085)		(0.087)		(0.092)		(0.087)		(0.092)	
Gender (0/1)	0.582	0.010	0.575	0.010	3.200	0.059**	3.254	0.060**	0.650	0.011	0.422	0.007	1.678	0.029	1.490	0.026
	(0.962)		(0.963)		(1.026)		(1.020)		(1.106)		(1.098)		(1.104)		(1.100)	
Social background																
Parental educational level (6–21)	3.727	0.432***	3.727	0.432***	1.666	0.204***	1.656	0.203***	1.335	0.155***	1.315	0.152***	−1.379	−0.159***	−1.403	−0.162***
	(0.189)		(0.190)		(0.202)		(0.201)		(0.218)		(0.216)		(0.217)		(0.217)	
Parental occupational status (10–90)	0.255	0.142***	0.251	0.140***	0.160	0.095***	0.148	0.088***	0.129	0.072**	0.111	0.062*	−0.186	−0.103***	−0.202	−0.112***
	(0.039)		(0.039)		(0.041)		(0.041)		(0.044)		(0.044)		(0.044)		(0.044)	
Family composition																
Divorced parents (0/1)			−0.299	−0.002			−0.757	−0.006			−7.750	−0.059**			−4.243	−0.032
			(2.227)				(2.360)				(2.540)				(2.544)	
Mother's age at childbirth (29 = 0)			0.113	0.023			0.584	0.124***			−0.264	−0.053*			−0.214	−0.043*
			(0.090)				(0.095)				(0.102)				(0.102)	
Working mother (0/1)			1.017	0.017			−0.475	−0.008			0.557	0.009			0.910	0.015
			(1.061)				(1.124)				(1.210)				(1.212)	
Family size (1–8)			−0.060	−0.004			−0.850	−0.053*			−1.162	−0.094***			−1.337	−0.078***
			(0.324)				(0.343)				(0.369)				(0.370)	
Constant	0.576		0.648		24.381***		27.889***		29.067***		37.397***		71.004***		77.899	
	(1.811)		(2.423)		(1.932)		(2.567)		(2.083)		(2.764)		(2.079)		(2.768)	
Adj. R^2	0.276		0.276		0.075		0.088		0.043		0.058		0.055		0.063	
Number of cases	2608				2608				2608				2608			

Source: Family Survey Dutch Population 1998, 2000, 2003.

* Significance: $p < 0.05$.

** Significance: $p < 0.01$.

*** Significance: $p < 0.001$.

a divorced parent's lowbrow reading. For both reading and television viewing our results show, as we expected, that older mothers are less attracted to popular content than younger mothers. More pronounced positive norms towards a cognitively stimulating home environment, combined with time pressure aspects, might play a role here. Children from larger families report less parental popular reading and television viewing than children from smaller families. More restrictive family situations, represented by growing up in large families and in divorced families, apparently hardly affect experienced parental highbrow media consumption, but do significantly reduce parental lowbrow media consumption. This difference is especially profound for reading. Higher status parents read a variety of books, but it appears that when they are under time pressure, they prefer highbrow content reading material.

4.3. Results for parental media guidance

Table 3 presents the regression models for parental media guidance. Model 1 shows that respondents from the younger birth cohorts experienced more reading guidance than respondents from the older cohorts. In contrast, the intensity of parental interaction on television content seems more or less constant over time. Next, Model 1 demonstrates the gendered nature of reading. Girls report that parents guide their reading behaviour substantially more than boys ($b = 8.6$). Since reading guidance is an interactive parent–child activity, gender-specific socialization in reading might be a possible explanation here. Note that in television guidance, as measured by active parental instruction on television content, no gender differences were observed.

In Model 1, with regard to the effects of social background, it seems clear that parental media guidance is socially differentiated. Respondents with higher educated parents do report more guidance activities, both in reading and television viewing, compared to respondents with lower educated parents. Each additional year of parental education raises parental reading guidance by 2.2 percent points and television instruction by 1.0 percent point. Parental occupational status affects parental reading guidance as well. When parents have a higher occupational status, respondents report significantly higher odds of parental reading guidance ($b = 0.3$). All in all, high-status parents seem to pay significantly more attention to providing reading guidance. Comparing parental reading and television guidance, it is remarkable to find that social background is far more important for reading guidance than for parent–child interaction on television viewing. Once more, our results suggest that reading might be more of a socially distinguishing practice for higher status parents than television viewing.

The results of Model 2 show the significant effect of family composition on parental media guidance. Again, the effects of parental social background are hardly affected by the introduction of family composition features. Divorce seems to restrict parental guidance of children's media activities. Children from divorced families report significantly less guidance on reading ($b = -6.2$) and television viewing ($b = -10.7$). Growing up in a large family also limits parental interaction. With every additional sibling, parental reading and television guidance decreases by, respectively, 2.5 and 2.0 percent points. Hence, the dilution hypothesis, asserting that in smaller families parents have more time to spend on each individual child, is confirmed.

Model 3 adds parental reading and television viewing as additional predictors. We suggested that parents' own media consumption would influence their guidance behaviour, thereby partly interpreting social background effects on parental guidance. From the results of Model 3, we must first conclude that all family composition effects are virtually unchanged by the introduction of parental reading and television viewing. Second, the effects of parental media

Table 3
OLS regression on parental media guidance of social background, family composition and parental media consumption (standard errors between brackets).

	Parental reading guidance						Parental television guidance					
	Model 1		Model 2		Model 3		Model 1		Model 2		Model 3	
	B	*β*	*B*	*β*	*B*	*β*	*B*	*β*	*B*	*β*	*B*	*β*
Control variables												
Birth cohort (1955 = 0)	0.249	0.056*	0.097	0.022	0.170	0.038*	0.217	0.053	0.081	0.020	0.134	0.033
	(0.081)		(0.085)		(0.078)		(0.122)		(0.127)		(0.122)	
Gender (0/1)	8.633	0.149***	8.427	0.146***	7.746	0.134***	1.947	0.034	1.571	0.027	1.510	0.026
	(1.029)		(1.017)		(0.930)		(1.677)		(1.664)		(1.604)	
Social background												
Parental educational level (6–21)	2.189	0.252***	2.145	0.247***	0.587	0.068	1.036	0.110**	1.009	0.107**	−0.173	−0.018
	(0.203)		(0.201)		(0.197)		(0.347)		(0.344)		(0.359)	
Parental occupational status (10–90)	0.302	0.168***	0.272	0.151***	0.153	0.085***	0.121	0.065	0.099	0.053	0.041	0.022
	(0.041)		(0.041)		(0.038)		(0.067)		(0.067)		(0.065)	
Family composition												
Divorced parents (0/1)			−6.210	−0.047*	−5.258	−0.040*			−10.658	−0.082**	−10.226	−0.079**
			(2.353)		(2.152)				(3.776)		(3.647)	
Mother's age at childbirth (29 = 0)			0.121	0.024	0.014	0.003			0.092	0.018	−0.021	−0.004
			(0.095)		(0.087)				(0.154)		(0.150)	
Working mother (0/1)			−0.103	−0.002	−0.335	−0.005			1.712	0.028	1.243	0.021
			(1.121)		(1.024)				(1.810)		(1.745)	
Family size (1–8)			−2.563	−0.149***	−2.273	−0.132***			−2.453	−0.137***	−1.979	−0.111***
			(0.342)		(0.314)				(0.578)		(0.564)	
Parental media consumption												
Parental highbrow book reading					0.283	0.281***					0.204	0.201***
					(0.021)						(0.036)	
Parental highbrow television viewing					0.166	0.156***					0.175	0.164***
					(0.018)						(0.032)	
Parental lowbrow book reading					0.123	0.122***					0.030	0.030
					(0.018)						(0.030)	
Parental lowbrow television viewing					−0.049	−0.049**					0.014	0.014
					(0.017)						(0.029)	
Constant	5.750		18.409***		12.840***		30.042***		41.170***		33.719***	
	(1.937)		(2.560)		(2.742)		(3.308)		(4.244)		(4.852)	
Adj. R^2	0.180		0.199		0.333		0.030		0.051		0.122	
Number of cases			2608				1155					

Source: Family Survey Dutch Population 1998, 2000, 2003.

* Significance: $p < 0.05$.

** Significance: $p < 0.01$.

*** Significance: $p < 0.001$.

consumption are highly significant and partially meet our expectations. For reading guidance, results show that parents who themselves read are also more inclined to interact on their children's reading behaviour. This is true regardless of the genres these parents prefer. Furthermore, reading guidance is affected by the television consumption of parents. Whereas watching highbrow television positively correlates with reading guidance, parental lowbrow television viewing limits parent–child reading interaction. Apparently in families where parents favour lowbrow television content, children's reading habits are significantly less stimulated. We further find that parents who prefer highbrow reading content and television programs tend to guide their children's television consumption more intensively than parents who consume less informational and cultural media content. These findings confirm our expectation that observation of parents behaviour is relevant for understanding intentional socialization activities. Third, the results in Model 3 demonstrate that for parental guidance the effects of social background are mediated to a great extent by parental media consumption. For reading guidance, the effect of parental educational level runs largely via the parents' own media behaviour. Regarding television guidance the effect of parental educational level is completely indirect. Additionally, the effect of the parents' occupational status is substantially lower and thus partly interpreted by parental media consumption as well.

5. Conclusion and discussion

This study examined differences in parental media socialization by social background and family composition. We used information on 2608 Dutch adults, who reported on the media socialization practices they experienced in their parental home. Study of social differentiation in parental media socialization is relevant because of its potential contribution to understanding the intergenerational transmission of beneficial and disadvantageous media skills. In this process we expected parental consumption of highbrow and lowbrow media content to play an important role. These media consumption patterns may largely explain parent-child interaction on media content and account for part of the effects of parental social background.

Our results underpin the dominant role of socioeconomic background in media socialization. We found that children from the higher social strata are privileged in the quality and quantity of parental media socialization activities. For virtually all of the selected parental media socialization practices, intentional and unintentional, we found parental social background to be the most significant predictor. Parents from higher social strata consume more highbrow media content and less lowbrow television programs. Our study confirmed the valued status of leisure reading, since all reading activities are more common in higher status families. Parent-child interaction on media consumption is also strongly affected by parental resources, especially when it comes to reading guidance. Prior research has revealed that higher educated parents are more involved in cognitively stimulating child-rearing activities, and this also seems to be the case in media-related communication between parent and child. It is therefore important to recognize that the parental role as educator in media affairs is socially differentiated to a large extent.

Family composition proved important too. Older mothers exhibit more highbrow and less lowbrow media consumption, thereby setting a more beneficial example in their media behaviour than younger mothers. Children from large families have to share their parents' attention, resulting in less parental guidance in media consumption. Remarkably, children with divorced parents report their parents to be less interactive on media content. Time restrictions may play a role here, in that divorced parents have less leisure time, or the contact between one of the parents and the child may be limited, which would obviously restrict actual media guidance. This may

have implications for a child's development. Not only are these children less intensively guided into acquiring beneficial reading skills, they are also less protected from possible harmful television effects. Policymakers involved in media education at home and at school might take these findings into account.

In addition, our study indicates that in parent-child interaction on media use the social background effects run largely via parents' own media consumption. This means that higher educated parents guide their children's media competencies more intensively, not only because they have the resources to do so, but also because they enjoy specific media content themselves and apparently want to transmit these preferences to their children. We find the opposite process for lower educated parents. These parents' low-cognitive media consumption ultimately results in less media guidance. These results indicate that the guidance process, which can be regarded as an intentional form of socialization, is perhaps less intentional than previously assumed.

In this study, we explored media socialization from a broad perspective, but some challenges for future research remain. Our study has some drawbacks. First, we made use of retrospective data which is frequently argued to be influenced by memory effects and social desirability bias. However, research on retrospective respondent reports of parental cultural capital using the FSDP data revealed no systematic bias (De Vries and De Graaf, 2006). Nonetheless, random error resulting in an underestimation of our results still may exist. Second, possible relevant predictors of media socialization, like parental perceptions of media effects and the time children actually spent on media use, are unavailable. Future research might include these aspects in their analyses. Third, parental media socialization might be gendered. After all, in various domains scholars have shown differential socialization effects for boys and girls, including in media use (McLeod and Brown, 1976; Livingstone, 2002). Although highly interesting, this issue is beyond the scope of the present study. The relevance of our research is mostly found in extending the cultural reproduction thesis by including family composition factors and unintentional as well as intentional parental socialization activities. Future research, however, will likely provide more insight into the effects of a possibly gendered parental media socialization. Fourth, we were unable to differentiate between fathers' and mothers' media guidance activities, which could be interesting too.

To conclude, research on the reproduction of social inequality may benefit from dealing with media socialization aspects as potentially independent sources of inequality. With an ever-growing supply of media content, combined with a growing number of highly educated parents, research on the long-term effects of parental media socialization would be interesting, and may contribute to explaining social inequality in numerous domains. We studied parents and their media socialization activities in the Dutch context. For upcoming research in this domain we suggest to study whether parental media socialization differs over countries and to what extent our results may be generalized to other nations.

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Natascha Notten studied sociology at the Radboud University Nijmegen (MA with distinction, 2005), where she currently works as a PhD student. Her research interests include social stratification, media consumption and parental media socialization activities.

Gerbert Kraaykamp is professor of empirical sociology in the Department of Sociology, Radboud University Nijmegen. His main fields of interest and current work are in social stratification and cultural consumption. He has published on these subjects in Dutch as well as international journals.